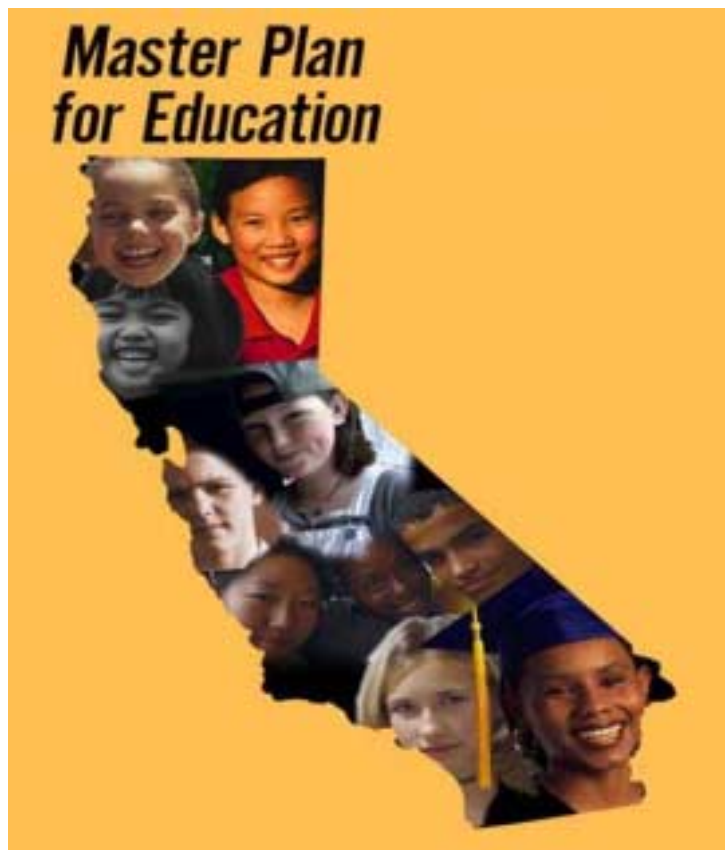


**Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for
Education – Kindergarten through University**

School Readiness Working Group *Executive Summary*



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CALIFORNIA MASTER PLAN FOR EDUCATION SCHOOL READINESS

Executive Summary

The Plan

The School Readiness report is based on a compelling body of scientific evidence that children's first five years of life are crucial to their future success. The report offers recommendations to build a statewide system of early education services that capture children's inherent desires to learn and achieve. This early education system's outcomes--improved educational achievement statewide, lower costs for corrective social expenditures, and a more productive populace over the long term--will ultimately benefit us all.

The Vision

We live in challenging times. Advances in science and technology have transformed our nation's economy, creating tremendous changes in the labor market. Very few jobs exist for an unskilled labor pool; even many entry-level jobs call for literacy, a high school education, a specific skill, and advanced training. Only through education can our children fulfill their individual and collective potential.

California's population trends present another challenge. Because our state is home to so many immigrants, our population is constantly changing. Cultural diversity is not merely a demographic footnote, but is one of the most fundamental characteristics of our youngest children. In California, 39 percent of children come from homes where a language other than English is spoken.¹ To respond to this reality, we must create better access to opportunity for all students while communicating respect and support for differences in their cultural origins. We must build on positive expectations and recognize that addressing cultural diversity is of the utmost importance.

California's Master Plan for Education must call for substantial innovations so that all children can learn and achieve their goals. We must start working on education when children are most receptive and parents are most engaged in their children's development. That means we cannot wait until children reach age five or six to help them fulfill their promise.² Early childhood is the time to forge a strong relationship between the two most important influences on a child---family and educators---to impact children's long-term success.

Today, states across the nation are investing in efforts to strengthen school readiness. In California, where an estimated 47 percent of all school-age children live in families with low incomes (under \$32,653 for a family of four) and about 27 percent of children birth to age four live in poverty (under \$17,650 for a family of four),³ the need for school readiness is critical. Low-income families often do not have the discretionary income, health care, literacy, or language fluency that make it easier to foster their children's school readiness. While families have the interest and motivation to promote their children's success, they lack the resources and support needed to make it happen. A Master Plan for Education should guide the development of a flexible support system, which will enable families to participate effectively in educating their children.

But it is not enough to build a system. A Master Plan for Education must identify ways to develop and retain a well-qualified early childhood workforce. The document should articulate a system that will monitor children's well-being and progress through the developmental cycles, and report on program performance in a variety of subsidized settings.

The Charge

By including school readiness in its Master Plan for Education, the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education—Kindergarten through University has made a powerful assertion: healthy development and learning in children's early years are essential for school success. We cannot afford to squander these early years; they are the time when we have the greatest opportunities to develop our children's potential. The Joint Committee challenged the School Readiness Working Group to look far and think big in designing a future for California's children.

Responding to this challenge, the Working Group reviewed long-existing policies and deeply entrenched assumptions about early learning and development, such as the age when public education begins and how transitions from one level of education to another are handled. We reconsidered existing "delivery systems" – such as pediatric care, mental health services, child welfare, and primary-grade education – with a view toward incorporating them into a more integrated, effective constellation of supports and services. We studied policies that will improve equity, enhance the qualifications of the people who work with children and families, and strengthen accountability. We also considered the roles of families and communities. Most importantly, we considered not only *what is*, but also *what could be*.

This Report

This report maps out a 20-year action plan of 14 recommendations, which aim to improve the school readiness of California's children, prepare them for success in school, and bolster their life chances for success. The recommendations form a coherent plan and are meant to be implemented together, although some entail major changes that will need to be addressed incrementally. We recognize that we are calling for a sweeping change to unify all publicly funded early care and education programs, in formal and informal settings, under one system with one set of standards.

Defining School Readiness

A decade ago, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) proposed as the nation's number one education goal that "All children in America will start school ready to learn." Initially, there was considerable debate about what the term "readiness" meant. Today, a view shared by many early childhood educators, and endorsed by the National Education Goals Panel, is that a *child's school readiness* has five key dimensions:⁴

Health and physical development. Children who are born with the benefit of prenatal care, and who have good nutrition, health monitoring, and early intervention, perform better in school.

Emotional well-being and social competence. Children who have secure relationships with family members and peers become self-confident learners.

Approaches toward learning. Children's attitudes toward learning, their ways of approaching new tasks, and their skills all affect school success.

Communicative skills. Children with rich language experiences have the tools to interact with other people and to represent their thoughts, feelings, and experiences effectively.

Cognition and general knowledge. Children who have the opportunity to explore and learn from their surroundings can construct knowledge of patterns and relationships and discover ways to solve problems.

These five dimensions all influence school performance. Thus, initiatives to strengthen children's readiness must take all of these factors into consideration. Moreover, elementary schools that want to be ready for the children who enter their kindergartens need to focus on these dimensions.

Furthermore, the NEGP developed and adopted ten attributes of schools that promote children's readiness for learning.⁵ *Ready schools:*

Smooth the transition between home and school.

Strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools.

Help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world.

Are committed to the success of every child.

Are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.

Introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement.

Are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children.

Serve children in communities.

Take responsibility for results.

Have strong leadership.

Lastly, the NEGP identified three objectives that reflect important *family and community supports* that are foundations for children's school readiness:⁶

Early childhood care and education. All children should have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare them for school.

Family factors. Every parent will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping his or her preschool child learn. To this end, parents should have access to the training and support they need.

Child health. Children should receive the nutrition, physical activity, and health care they need to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies and to maintain mental alertness. To this end, the number of low birth weight babies should be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal care.

The Recommendations

IMPROVE SCHOOL READINESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

The report proposes a coordinated set of programs and services to improve the school readiness and achievement of all children, from birth through grade three.

1. FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS: Fund high quality programs for all low-income infants and toddlers and enhance developmental screening in the earliest years of life.

A. Enact legislation to guarantee all low-income (or otherwise eligible) families access to subsidized, standards-based child development services.

Data demonstrate that the quality of care is poorest for infants and toddlers and that children who receive poor quality care do not achieve developmental and school readiness outcomes compared to children who receive better services. Infant and toddler services, funded through a per-child allocation, should be available as a parental option and should include family child care, center-based care, and parenting information and support through School Readiness Centers. The guarantee should be phased in by 2010, starting in communities with schools that have an Academic Performance Index (API) in the bottom three deciles.

B. Enact legislation that establishes accountability in the health care system for providing comprehensive and continuous health and developmental screening and assessment services for all children, beginning at birth.

Children enrolled in Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, and many commercial health plans are currently offered periodic preventive health visits with developmental screenings and assessments. However, these screenings and assessments need a much stronger child development component, including psychosocial and cognitive measures. Furthermore, health care plans should be required to implement quality measurement tools to monitor health care providers' delivery of screening and assessment services.

Data from comprehensive assessments at appropriate developmental milestones (e.g., collected from children at birth and 1, 3, and 5 years of age) should be documented in a statewide data system. These assessments will assist parents with early intervention plans, if needed. Health care providers must ensure that children identified with disabilities, developmental delays, or learning needs receive specialized services.

2. FOR PRESCHOOLERS: For the two years leading up to kindergarten entry, provide universal access to formal preschool programs that offer group experiences, standards-based curricula, and individualized transition plans to kindergarten.

A. *Enact legislation that phases in publicly funded universal preschool in a variety of settings for all three-and four-year olds whose parents choose to enroll them.*

The case for universal, voluntary preschool beginning at age three has been advanced by policymakers, researchers, employers, parent groups, and education leaders because of its unequivocal link to children's readiness for and long-term success in school, and because of its proven cost-effectiveness. Preschool expansion should build on models of high-quality programs that exist. It must create new spaces, beginning immediately in communities where schools have an API in the bottom three deciles, with spaces available by 2010 for all children whose families choose to enroll them.

B. *Enact legislation that requires all public elementary schools and subsidized child development programs to create individualized readiness transition plans for preschoolers entering kindergarten.*

Such plans must include strong family and community components and descriptions of how to achieve continuity between home and school and descriptions of how to achieve pedagogical and curricular continuity between preschool and elementary school.

C. *Enact legislation that requires the phasing in of dual-language learning for all young children in programs that receive public subsidies.*

Given California's demographics, globalization trends, and young children's receptivity to second-language acquisition, all early childhood settings should foster dual-language learning, with the ultimate goal of making every California child bilingual/biliterate with progress evident by the end of third grade. To recruit and retain the qualified staff needed to implement this recommendation, the early childhood development funding formula should provide incentives for providers with dual-language proficiency.

3. FOR KINDERGARTENERS: Require kindergarten attendance for all children; phase in full-school-day kindergarten; and align preschool and kindergarten standards, curricula, and services.

A. *Enact legislation to include kindergarten in the compulsory education system.*

Currently, 94 percent of California children attend kindergarten. With more rigorous academic standards now in place, California needs to acknowledge the importance of kindergarten in giving children an even start. Children need adequate preparation prior to entering the primary grades, when children are often set in academic trajectories that can last a lifetime.⁷

B. *Enact legislation to phase in full-school-day kindergarten for all California children, beginning in districts with schools with the lowest API scores.*

Phasing in full-school-day kindergarten should begin immediately for communities with schools that have API scores in the bottom three deciles, and the program should be expanded significantly each year until all of California's children have a full-school-day kindergarten experience.

Research indicates that in full-school-day programs, children spend more time in the types of learning activities that lead to improved achievement. Children experience higher standard scores in reading and math, less retention, better attendance, and higher ratings for many positive behaviors.⁸

C. *Enact legislation to direct the California Department of Education to require and support continuity between the standards and curricula for preschool and kindergarten.*

Such standards should balance social/emotional and cognitive outcomes and reduce the current disparities in standards and curricula. The standards should address the National Education Goals Panel's five dimensions of a child's school readiness (See Page 6).

4. FOR CHILDREN IN PRIMARY GRADES: Require "Ready Schools" plans to build on the gains that children have made during their early years.

A. *Enact legislation that requires all schools to implement standards-based rich learning experiences and support services in kindergarten through the primary grades to preserve and extend the gains that children have made in preschool.*

Compelling research finds that the gains children make in preschools can be sustained if elementary schools create individualized services that provide family education, family literacy, and other family supports and that offer social, health, and nutrition services to children in addition to purposeful, standards-based curricula.⁹

B. *Enact legislation that requires all public elementary schools to create, submit, and/or revise a "Ready Schools" plan.*

The National Education Goals Panel has developed and adopted research-based criteria for Ready Schools that should form the basis for each elementary school's self analysis and improvement plan. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that families, preschools and schools collaborate to ensure children's success in elementary school. Reviews should be conducted in alignment with existing school improvement plans, with reports submitted to the local school board and county superintendent of schools.

**5. FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS:
Establish accountability and mandate professional development to ensure effective placements of children in inclusive and appropriate early childhood education programs with suitable adult-child ratios for children with disabilities and other special needs.**

A. Enact legislation to establish accountability for effective placement of children with disabilities and other special needs in inclusive and appropriate early childhood education programs.

Children with disabilities and other special needs should be served alongside other children. All programs serving young children must comply with family requests to enroll children with disabilities and provide for their effective education. All programs and families should have access to a multi-disciplinary team to consult with and train adults. The team should also be available to assess children and provide early intervention services to support inclusive and appropriate services.

B. Enact legislation that mandates professional development on educating children with disabilities and other special needs for educators who work with young children in publicly-funded settings.

Child care providers report that they need training, onsite mentoring, and additional staff support to effectively serve children with disabilities and other special needs. Providers need training on how to better work with children and how to obtain ancillary services individual children qualify for under the law.¹⁰

C. Enact legislation that establishes and funds appropriate adult-child ratios in mainstream settings that include children with significant disabilities.

The care and education of young children with disabilities often demands more adults per child than current ratios provide. The nature of the disability and the child's needs should drive the ratio.

BUILD A STRONGER STATEWIDE SYSTEM FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SERVICES

The report offers recommendations for ensuring and sustaining excellence in early education, regardless of the setting, including upgrading existing programs; developing systems of staffing and professional development, accountability, governance, finance; and increasing and improving facilities.

6. CHILD OUTCOMES AND PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS:

Require the use of child learning and development goals supported by individual learning plans and uniform program standards for all publicly funded licensed and license-exempt programs.

A. *Enact legislation that requires adoption of child learning and developmental goals from the California Department of Education's Desired Results, for children from birth to age five, and implement an assessment system for children ages three to five that assures appropriate usage of assessment instruments for instructional improvement and children's achievement.*

Goals for children should establish high expectations in all five school readiness dimensions: health and physical development, emotional well-being and social competence, approaches toward learning, communicative skills, and cognition and general knowledge. The goals should be used as the basis for the tools to provide ongoing assessment of children and instructional practice. The assessment's results should be communicated to parents on a regular basis.

B. *Enact legislation that requires individualized learning plans for all children in publicly-supported family child care homes, preschools, and kindergartens.*

Such learning plans should be based on individual, performance-based child assessments (including portfolios); updated several times each year (more frequently for younger children); and discussed with families. Providers in informal care settings should develop the plans with the assistance of family child care home provider networks.

C. *Enact legislation that directs the California Department of Education to develop a uniform set of program standards, including appropriate adult-child ratios and grouping practices, for all subsidized licensed and license-exempt providers.*

Currently, Title 5 providers must meet a higher standard than Title 22 providers, which often results in inequitable services for young children. A single set of program standards is needed.

Appropriate ratios and group size influence child outcomes and must be addressed in any school readiness enhancement effort. Consequently, all subsidized settings should comply with Title 5 ratios, modified to recommend that group size not exceed 20. Funding must be available to implement this quality enhancement, similar to the approach used to enact class size reduction in elementary schools.

7. STAFFING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Enact Omnibus Early Childhood Development legislation that raises standards for early childhood educators and funds a professional development system that prepares, supports, and guides the compensation of all adults who care for and educate children.

There is substantial research showing the link between caregiver characteristics and program quality.¹¹ To build and sustain a qualified early care and education workforce, California must recruit qualified early educators, raise education requirements and make them consistent across all subsidized service delivery modes, reduce turnover resulting from poor compensation, and require minimum training for all providers.

A. Require the California Department of Education to establish an integrated statewide professional development system to recruit, train, and credential qualified early childhood educators.

With many elements of a professional development system already in place, California must now focus on linking the system's elements and developing a training registry. The registry will approve continuing education unit training and chronicle all training providers receive. The training registry must be open to all California providers, who may voluntarily participate.

B. Adopt more rigorous education requirements and standards of certification.

Require a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field for individuals who teach each group of 20 children in center-based programs; supervise those who care for and educate young children; or coordinate a network of family child care home providers.

C. Establish an early childhood education compensation and benefits system comparable to the compensation system in public schools.

For those who have a Bachelor's degree or above and who perform functions comparable to their public school colleagues, salaries, benefits and annual cost of living increases should be commensurate. For those who do not have a Bachelor's degree but are working toward a Bachelor's or Associate's degree or a Child Development Permit, salaries and benefits should be commensurate with public school employers who have similar training, experience, and job descriptions. Furthermore, those working toward a degree or Permit who are employed caring for and teaching children in early care and education settings should receive salary increases when they successfully complete approved courses.

- D. *Require 48 hours of paid professional development for all providers working in programs that receive public subsidies and who have not had formal training (including providers who are license-exempt).***

If the providers have not started work with young children, the professional development should occur pre-service; if they are already working with young children, it should take place in-service within a prescribed time period. Once employed, all providers must have current CPR and first aid certification and must comply with Trustline, including renewing registration periodically.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY: Enact legislation to create an accountability system (including program evaluation) that ensures that public investments in early care and education result in improved school readiness and, over time, improved achievement.

- A. *Require the California Department of Education to collect and utilize data for early childhood program accountability.***

To assess the effectiveness of California's programs for young children, program accountability data must be collected annually. These data should include information on program staffing, turnover, and levels of training; numbers of children served; average attendance; nature of family supports and activities; accreditation status and other program attributes.

- B. *To ensure that programs are effective, require collection of accountability data every three years on student outcomes for three- and four-year old children in programs that receive public subsidies.***

Such data should be collected on a random sample of enrolled children, using assessment instruments that are closely aligned with California Department of Education's *Desired Results*. The evaluation process must comply with strict confidentiality standards.

- C. *Integrate statewide early childhood data collection with kindergarten through grade 12 data collection so that such data will be used to inform efforts to improve policy and practice.***

Presently, data on young children are collected by multiple entities, using different timelines, data collection tools, and systems. Moreover, these data are not linked with data collected on kindergarten through grade 12 students. A single data collection entity should coordinate and assure the appropriate use of the data to improve children's school readiness, their transitions to school, and their effectiveness in school.

9. GOVERNANCE: Combine all existing state and federal child care and development programs into one early education system under the California Department of Education. Devolve decision-making regarding planning and resource allocation to county superintendents of schools.

A. *Establish a Cabinet position with the title, Secretary of Education and Child Development, and reconfigure the California State Board of Education.*

This plan seeks to provide a coherent governance system and clear lines of accountability for early education services in California. To create a single and direct line of accountability for education, this proposal replaces the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction with a Cabinet position directly accountable to the Governor for education administration. To preserve the check and balance nature of state government, the State Board of Education, the education policy-setting body, would cease to be all gubernatorial appointees. Instead, the State Board would be a combination of Legislative and Gubernatorial appointees, and include four members from newly constituted advisory committees to the California Department of Education (see Recommendation 9C).

B. *Create two divisions within the California Department of Education, the division of Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE) serving children birth through grade three, and the division of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), serving students in grades four through twelve.*

Early childhood, as a developmental period, stretches from birth through the primary grades. This plan reflects that understanding and calls for greater continuity in educational services to young children. The California Department of Education would be reconfigured to achieve greater emphasis on early education. Two divisions are created to work in tandem, ensuring that children benefit from the structure of both early and compulsory education as a continuum of learning, with differences in administration invisible to children and their families.

C. *Create an advisory committee for the Division of Early Childhood and Primary Education and an advisory committee for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education.*

Two advisory committees will assist the two new Divisions of the California Department of Education. The committees will consist of nine legislative and gubernatorial appointees with expertise in education, health or social services. Advisory committee members would select their Chair and a second representative who would become members of the State Board of Education.

D. *Expand the role of the county superintendents of schools in the governance and fiscal oversight of early childhood education.*

This recommendation proposes devolution of planning and decision-making authority closer to those who receive and provide services. The county superintendents of schools already provide fiscal oversight and some program operations for school districts. Making the county superintendent of schools the lead local entity for governance and finance of early education services expands an existing role. They will be assisted in the decision-making process by a County Early Childhood Development Advisory Council (See Recommendation 9E).

E. *Create a County Early Childhood Development Advisory Council (CECDAC) to advise the county superintendent regarding resource allocation, infrastructure development, and program and service accountability.*

The CECDAC will make recommendations to the county superintendent of schools regarding allocation of funds, professional development, quality enhancement, planning and coordination, regulations, and approval of local school readiness plans. It will also manage due process for grievances and compliance actions. The CECDAC will be composed of 15 members who are elected officials from local school boards, members of the child development community, parents, and business representatives.

10. FINANCE: Develop and fund a per-child allocation model of financing early care and education sufficient to meet the new system's quality standards and organizational infrastructure requirements.

Two challenges face the financing of early childhood development services in California. First, the system has insufficient revenue to ensure that all children have access to high quality early education services. While California invests considerable resources in its children under age five, the investments are not commensurate with the importance of the early learning experience or the investments made for school-age children. Second, there is not efficient coordination and distribution of the funds that do exist, complicated by too many types of categorical funding. While these recommendations represent a significant cost to the state, successfully implementing them will mitigate the spiraling costs for corrective education and social services later on.

A. *Enact legislation that expands Proposition 98 to create a new guaranteed per-child state allocation for all three- and four-year olds to fund core universal preschool services.*

Proposition 98 funds should be increased by an amount sufficient to provide access for every three- and four-year-old child whose parents want their child to receive a high-quality preschool experience (see Recommendation 2). Phase-in of guaranteed universal preschool should be completed by 2010, starting in communities where schools have an API in the bottom three deciles.

B. *Enact legislation to allocate additional funds for wraparound (before and after preschool) care and flexible support services for low-income families with three- and four-year olds attending universal preschool.*

Families who are eligible for subsidized child development services should receive an allocation for "wraparound" child care and family support services. Phase-in should match the efforts to expand core universal preschool services, so that families can receive core services and wraparound services together.

C. *Enact legislation that creates a state allocation that will be increased annually to become a guarantee over time, providing all low-income birth to three-year olds with early care and education services and flexible support services used at parents' discretion.*

The per-child allocation for early education should use a funding equation based on the comprehensive services model in Head Start and Early Head Start. The funds should be used for child care and development and flexible support services that the family needs (See Recommendation 1). A guaranteed state allocation should be phased-in by 2010, starting with service to children birth to three in communities where schools have an API in the bottom three deciles.

D. *Enact legislation that creates a state allocation for all children, birth to kindergarten, to fund school readiness services at local School Readiness Centers.*

Using the same revenue limit concept that provides basic education funding for each California K-12 student, create a guaranteed allocation within Proposition 98 to serve the families of children from birth to Kindergarten. This allocation should fund local School Readiness Centers, which will provide core services such as parent education and outreach, information and referral, child development activities, peer support, and life skills development (See Recommendation 12).

E. *Enact legislation to create a Financing Task Force to calculate the per-child allocation needed to fund high-quality early education services and organizational infrastructure for low-income newborns to three-year olds, for universal preschool and wraparound care, and school readiness services for families with children, from birth to Kindergarten.*

Create a California Financing Task Force to calculate the per-child allocation that should be created to fund high quality early education services for birth to three-year-olds, for universal preschool, and support services for low-income children, birth to Kindergarten. The allocation must include an investment in quality improvement, professional development and compensation, accountability, and other elements of the organizational infrastructure. The Task Force must also address the issue of fees for those who can afford to pay for part or all of the services provided. This Task Force should be convened immediately so that its work can advise the Legislature in setting appropriations for the above recommendations. As part of their work, they should also determine a formula for cost of living increases, and the cost for group size reduction from 24 to 20 (see Recommendation 6C).

F. *Enact legislation that consolidates under the Department of Education child care funds that currently flow through the Departments of Education and Social Services.*

Consistent with the recommendation to implement a governance structure that unifies early childhood education under one department, funds should also be consolidated and flow through one department.

11. FACILITIES: Improve the availability, quality, and maintenance of early education facilities.

A. *Enact legislation that will significantly increase the number of school facilities serving young children.*

Presently, the number of public schools serving young children is inadequate to handle demand in local communities. Expanding capital outlay formulas to include kindergarten and preschool programs can significantly reduce the current shortfall.

B. *Enact legislation that provides incentives to foster facility construction and development.*

Such efforts might include increased state income tax credits to employers for developing early education programs, mortgage credits as incentives for higher quality family child care, low-cost loan pools, bond issues, and streamlined zoning processes.

C. *Enact legislation that establishes design standards for subsidized early childhood facilities, appropriate to young children's development.*

Current building standards under Title 22 are limited to very basic requirements, such as square footage per child. New design standards should incorporate requirements that better define space based on the developmental needs of young children. The space should also be constructed and organized in ways that promote better workplace safety for the adults who care for young children.

ENHANCE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

The Report recognizes the importance of families in children's lives and the impact of neighborhoods on family life. It recommends a system of services that addresses school readiness in all of its dimensions and also promotes family responsibility and involvement in children's educational success. Finally, the report emphasizes building community capacity to promote children's school readiness, achievement, and well-being.

12. SCHOOL READINESS CENTERS: Enact legislation that will allocate resources to establish a network of neighborhood-based School Readiness Centers that gives all families access to essential services to meet children's developmental needs.

Polls consistently show that new parents want and need help as they make decisions for their children, foster good health and development, and arrange for their care and education.¹² Families need information and services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and they feel that a neighborhood center would help meet this need.¹³ Furthermore, home-based child care providers, often isolated, are interested in learning about early childhood development and sharing their experiences. The School Readiness Centers would provide a forum to educate caregivers.

The centers would provide core services to families and caregivers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Services would include parenting education and support, child and family development, literacy development, and health and mental health information and services. School Readiness Centers would engage the community to create and coordinate services that reflect local preferences and that promote the importance of the early years to the public. Where possible, such centers would build upon existing resources.

13. HEALTH CARE RESOURCES: Provide stable and continuous health care for children and pregnant women, develop a statewide system for issuing health and development "passports," and expand insurance coverage.

A. Enact legislation to ensure that every California child has access to a "health care home," including prenatal care.

Care for all children should be provided through a health care home with a primary care provider who offers services that are accessible, family-centered, comprehensive, coordinated, culturally competent, and linguistically appropriate. In addition to addressing the child's physical health needs, the health care home must also offer comprehensive developmental screening and assessment services, especially during children's early years, to support and enhance their cognitive, emotional and social development.

Early and comprehensive prenatal care is essential to ensure that every child has the best start possible. Prenatal care must include ongoing regular care and visits, parenting information, nutrition services, and psychosocial services.

B. *Enact legislation that funds a statewide health and development “passport” for every California child.*

Each child must have a health and development passport that is portable and that chronicles the health services and developmental screenings received. The passport would provide families with current information about their children that they could share with service providers and educators to assure appropriate and coordinated support. The health and development passport would be established and maintained by the child's health care home.

C. *To increase the number of children covered, enact legislation to expand Healthy Families for children and their families with incomes up to 300% of poverty.*

Many working families do not have sufficient discretionary income to purchase health insurance, thus limiting their child's access to preventive developmental and health care services and medical care. Furthermore, family-based coverage is more effective than child-based coverage in increasing the percent of eligible children who actually become enrolled.

14. WORK AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: Provide incentives for paid family leave and employer/workplace family-friendly practices.

A. *Enact legislation to create a paid family leave benefit that may be based on insurance models with contributions shared among employers, employees, and public funds.*

Currently, new parents have very limited family leave options. Recent research indicates that there is strong support among all Californians for paid family leave for infant care. Parents, the general public, and opinion leaders all support leave for one or both parents.¹⁴ Given the crucial nature of the early years of life, the importance of parents' early and intense involvement with their children, and the costs of infant care, paid parental leave should be available for new parents.

B. *Enact legislation to provide incentives for employers to implement family-friendly policies geared to helping parents carry out their parental responsibilities.*

The current California tax credit emphasizes on-site child care centers. The state could provide incentives with varying credits for flexible benefit programs, flexible scheduling, job sharing and flexible use of parental sick leave to promote employee productivity and facilitate employment among parents of young children.

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- ² Jack Shonkoff and Deborah Phillips, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*; National Research Council, *How People Learn: Mind, Brain, Experience, School—Expanded Edition* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000); Burton H. Singer and Carol D. Ryff, eds. *New Horizons in Health: An Integrative Approach* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001).
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- ⁴ Goal 1 Technical Planning Group, *Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Common Views and Vocabulary* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Goals Panel, 1995).
- ⁵ R. Shore, *Ready Schools* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Goals Panel, 1998).
- ⁶ The National Education Goals Panel. *Special Early Childhood Report 1997*. (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1997).
- ⁷ Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades, *Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1996).
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- ⁹ Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Robertson and Emily A. Mann. Long Term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2001; 285: 2339-2346.
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